

## CAPVT XXVII

# Irregular Comparison of Adjectives

### GRAMMATICA

#### IRREGULAR COMPARISON OF ADJECTIVES

Some adjectives have comparisons that do not follow the regular patterns introduced in Capvt XXVI.

##### Superlatives of *-er* and *-lis* Adjectives

Two groups of adjectives, which are otherwise regular, have peculiar forms in the superlative. Six adjectives ending in *-lis* form the superlative by adding *-limus*, *-lima*, *-linum* to the base:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
<i>fácilis</i> , -e ( <i>easy</i> )	<i>facilior</i> , -ius ( <i>easier</i> )	<i>facil-limus</i> , -a, -um ( <i>easiest</i> )
<i>diffícilis</i> , -e ( <i>difficult</i> )	<i>diffícilior</i> , -ius ( <i>more difficult</i> )	<i>diffícillimus</i> , -a, -um ( <i>most difficult</i> )
<i>símilis</i> , -e ( <i>like</i> )	<i>simílior</i> , -ius ( <i>more l.</i> )	<i>simíllimus</i> , -a, -um ( <i>most l.</i> )

*Dissimilis* (*unlike, dissimilar*), *gracilis* (*slender, thin*), and *humilis* (*low, humble*) follow this same pattern; all other *-lis* adjectives have regular superlatives (e.g., *fidélissimus*, *útilissimus*, etc.).

Adjectives with a masculine in *-er*, regardless of declension, form the superlative by adding *-rimus*, not to the base, but directly to this masculine *-er*; the comparatives of such adjectives are formed regularly, by adding *-ior*, *-ius* to the base (which, as you know, in some cases retains the *-e-* and sometimes drops it):

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
<i>líber</i> , -bera, -berum ( <i>free</i> )	<i>libérior</i> , -ius ( <i>freer</i> )	<i>libér-rimus</i> , -a, -um ( <i>freest</i> )
<i>púlcher</i> , -chra, -chrum ( <i>beautiful</i> )	<i>púlchríor</i> , -ius ( <i>more beautiful</i> )	<i>pulchér-rimus</i> , -a, -um ( <i>most beautiful</i> )
<i>âcer</i> , âcris, âcre ( <i>keen</i> )	<i>âcríor</i> , âcarius ( <i>keener</i> )	<i>âcér-rimus</i> , -a, -um ( <i>keenest</i> )

### Other Irregular Adjective Comparisons

A few common adjective comparisons are so irregular that their comparatives and superlatives must simply be memorized; many of the irregularities are examples of **SUPPLETION** (see Capvt XI), just like English "good, better, best" and "bad, worse, worst," whose comparatives and superlatives derive from words not cognate with the positive forms. Following are some of the most important, which you will need to memorize (English derivatives can help with this: see the Etymologia section below):

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
bónus, -a, -um ( <i>good</i> )	mélior, -ius ( <i>better</i> )	óptimus, -a, -um ( <i>best</i> )
mágnus, -a, -um ( <i>great</i> )	máior, -ius ( <i>greater</i> )	máximus, -a, -um ( <i>greatest</i> )
málus, -a, -um ( <i>bad</i> )	péior, -ius ( <i>worse</i> )	péssimus, -a, -um ( <i>worst</i> )
múltus, -a, -um ( <i>much</i> )	—, plūs ( <i>more</i> )	plúrimus, -a, -um ( <i>most</i> )
párvus, -a, -um ( <i>small</i> )	mínor, mínus ( <i>smaller</i> )	mínimus, -a, -um ( <i>smallest</i> )
(prae, prō) ( <i>in front of, before</i> )	prior, -ius ( <i>former</i> )	prímus, -a, -um ( <i>first</i> )
súperus, -a, -um ( <i>that above</i> )	superior, -ius ( <i>higher</i> )	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> { súmmus, -a, -um (<i>highest, furthest</i>)  suprémus, -a, -um (<i>highest, last</i>) </div> </div>

There is no positive degree adjective corresponding to *prior* and *prímus*, since those words, by the very definition of "priority" and "primacy," imply comparison with one or more persons or things; the prepositions *prae* and *prō*, however, are related.

### Declension of Plūs

None of the irregular forms offers any declensional difficulty except *plūs*. In the plural *plūs* functions as an adjective (e.g., *plūrēs amīcī*), but has mixed i-stem and consonant-stem forms (-ium in the genitive plural but -a, not -ia, in the neuter nominative and accusative); in the singular it functions not as an adjective at all, but as a neuter noun which is commonly followed by a genitive of the whole (e.g., *plūs pecūniae*, *more money*, lit. *more of money*—see Capvt XV).

	Singular M. & F.	N.	Plural M. & F.	N.
Nom.	—	plūs	plūrēs	plúra
Gen.	—	plūris	plúrium	plúrium
Dat.	—	—	plúribus	plúribus
Acc.	—	plūs	plūrēs	plúra
Abl.	—	plúre	plúribus	plúribus

## VOCĀBVLA

Some tips for the new vocabulary: don't confuse forms of *sōl* and *sōlus*, -a, -um; review the discussion of consonantal *i* in the *Intrōductiō*, p. xxxviii, and listen carefully online to the pronunciation of *maior*, *maius*, something like "mai-yor," "mai-yus," etc.; note the special meanings of the plurals *superī* and *maiōrēs* (which the Romans often employed in a phrase invoking ancestral custom, the *mōs maiōrum*); and note that you must learn all the irregular comparative and superlative adjective forms listed in the table above.

*dēlectātiō*, *dēlectātiōnis*, f., *delight, pleasure, enjoyment* (delectation, delectable, delicious, dilettante; cf. *dēlectō*)

*népōs*, *nepōtis*, m., *grandson, descendant* (nephew, nepotism, niece)

*sōl*, *sōlis*, m., *sun* (solar, solarium, solstice, parasol)

*dīligēns*, gen. *dīligētis*, *diligent, careful* (diligence, diligently)

*dissīmilis*, *dissīmile*, *unlike, different* (dissimilar, dissimilarity, dissemble)

*grācilis*, *grācile*, *slender, thin* (gracile, gracility)

*hūmilis*, *hūmile*, *lowly, humble* (humility, humiliate, humiliation)

*maior*, *maius*, compar. adj., *greater; older*; *maiōrēs*, *maiōrum*, m. pl., *ancestors* (i.e., *the older ones*; major, majority, etc.—see Etymologia below)

*prīmus*, *prīma*, *prīmum*, *first, foremost, chief, principal* (primary, primate, prime, primeval, primer, premier, primitive, prim, primo-geniture, prima facie, primordial, primrose)

quot, indecl. adj., *how many, as many as* (quota, quotation, quotient)

*sīmilis*, *sīmile*, + gen. or dat., *similar (to), like, resembling* (simile, assimilate, simulate, dissimulate, verisimilitude, assemble, resemble, simultaneous; "same" is cognate)

*sūperus*, *sūpera*, *sūperum*, *above, upper*; *sūperī*, *superōrum*, m. pl., *the gods* (superior, etc.; cf. *superō* and see Etymologia below)

*ūtilis*, *ūtile*, *useful, advantageous* (what Latin is to YOU!—utility, from *ūtilitās*, -tātis; utilitarian, utilization, utilize)

All the irregular adjectival forms listed above, p. 218–19

*pōnō*, *pōnere*, *pōsuī*, *pōsitum*, *to put, place, set* (see Etymologia below)

*prōbō*, *probāre*, *probāvī*, *probātum*, *to approve, recommend; test* (probe, probate, probable, approbation, proof, prove, approval, improve, reprobate; cf. *probitās*)

## LĒCTIŌ ET TRĀNSLĀTIŌ

The most important activities for the *Lēctiō et Trānslātiō* section are to read aloud, read for comprehension, and then translate (listen to the Latin too, if you

have the CDs); but for practice with the new grammar, you should scan through the readings for all comparative and superlative adjectives, noting which are regular and which are irregular.

## EXERCITATIONES

1. Quisque cupit quam pulcherrima atque utilissima dona dare.
2. Quidam turpes habent plurima sed etiam plura petunt.
3. Ille orator, ab tyranno superbissimò expulsus, ducem iucundiorem et leges aequiores dehinc quaesivit.
4. Summum imperium optimis viris semper petendum est.
5. Senex nepotibus tristibus casam patefecit et eos trans limen invitavit.
6. Ostendit ultimum signum luce clarissimā ab hostibus illā nocte datum esse.
7. Iste tyrannus pessimus negavit se viros liberos umquam oppressisse.
8. Fidelissimus servus plus cenae ad mensam accipiebat quam tres peiores.
9. Aiunt hunc auctorem vitam humillimam hic agere.
10. Cur di superi oculos a rebus humanis eo tempore avertērunt?
11. Habesne pecuniam et res tuas prae re publicā?
12. Solem post paucas nubes gracillimas in caelo hodie videre possumus.
13. Some believe that very large cities are worse than very small ones.
14. In return for the three rather small gifts, the young man gave even more and prettier ones to his very sad mother.
15. Those very large mountains were higher than these.

## SENTENTIAE ANTICVAE

1. Trahit me nova vis: video meliora proboque, sed peiora tantum facio et nescio cur. (Ovid.)
2. Quaedam carmina sunt bona; plura sunt mala. (Martial.)
3. Optimum est. Nihil melius, nihil pulchrius hoc vidi. (Terence.)
4. Spero te et hunc natalem et plurimos alios quam felicissimos acturum esse. (Pliny.—natalis [diēs], birthday; "natal," "Natalie.")
5. Quoniam consilium et ratio sunt in senibus, maiores nostri summum concilium appellaverunt "senatum." (Cicero.—concilium, -i, n., council; "conciliate," "reconcile"; be careful to distinguish concilium, consilium, and consul.)
6. Plus operae studiique in rebus domesticis nobis nunc ponendum est etiam quam in rebus militaribus. (Cicero.—opera, -ae, f., work, effort; "opera," "operation," "cooperate."—domesticus, -a, -um; "domesticate," "domesticity."—militaris, -e; "militarism," "demilitarize"; cf. miles.)
7. Neque enim periculum in re publicā fuit gravius umquam neque otium maius. (Cicero.)

8. Sumus sapientiōrēs illis, quod nōs nātūram esse optimam ducem scīmus. (Cicero.—*optimam*: f. by attraction to the gender of *nātūram*.)
9. Nātūra minimum petit; nātūrae autem sē sapiēns accommodat. (\*Seneca.—*accommodāre*, to adapt; "accommodation.")
10. Maximum remedium irae mora est. (\*Seneca.)
11. Quī animum vincit et iram continet, eum cum summīs virīs nōn comparō sed eum esse simillimum deō dicō. (Cicero.—*comparāre*, to compare; "comparable," "comparison.")
12. Dionysius, tyrannus urbis pulcherrimae, erat vir summae in victū temperantiae et in omnibus rēbus diligentissimus et ācerimus. Idem tamen erat ferōx ac iniūstus. Quā ex rē, sī vērū dicimus, vidēbātur miserrimus. (Cicero.—Dionysius, ruler of Syracuse in the 4th cent. B.C.—*vīctus*, -ūs, m., *mode of life*; "victual," "vittles."—*temperantia*, -ae, f.; "temperate," "intemperance."—*iniūstus*, -a, -um, *unjust*; "injustice."—*quā ex rē*: = *ex illā rē*.)
13. Nisi superōs vertere possum, Acheronta movēbō. (Vergil.—*Acheronta*: Gk. acc., *Acheron*, a river in the underworld, here by metonymy *the land of the dead*.)

### Alley Cat

Caeli, Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa,  
 illa Lesbia, quam Catullus ūnam  
 plūs quam sē atque suōs amāvit omnēs,  
 nunc in quadriviis et angiportīs  
 5 glūbit magnanimi Remi nepōtēs.

\*Catullus *Carm.* 58: This poem, a single sent. sardonically addressed to Caelius, a former rival for Lesbia's favors, clearly was composed at an even lower point of Catullus' relationship with Lesbia than his *Carmen* 8, which you read (and may wish to re-read now) in Capvt XIX; meter: hendecasyllabic.—*quadrivium*, -iī, n., *crossroads*.—*angiportum*, -i, n., *alley*.—*glūbō*, -ere, to peel (back), strip (off); used of stripping the bark off trees or the skin off an animal, here in an obscene sense.—*Remus*: Remus was slain by his brother, Romulus, who became legendary founder of Rome and the city's first king; his *nepōtēs* are his imagined descendants—Rome's nobility—in Catullus' day.

**QVAESTIŌNĒS:** Marcus Caelius Rufus, a dissolute young senator, had earned Catullus' resentment for his own affair with Lesbia (a pseudonym, you may recall from Capvt II, for Clodia, wife of another senator: this was a true Roman soap opera!); comment on the irony in Catullus' use of *nostra* in addressing him. Recalling that demonstratives are "pointing words," what do you sense as the effect of *illa* here, and in what ways does Catullus emphasize the word?—comment too on the arrangement of *Lesbia illa, illa Lesbia*. Why do you suppose Catullus chose to imagine Lesbia's dallying in alleyways with Remus' descendants, rather than Romulus'?

## Thanks a Lot, Tully!

Disertissime Rōmulī nepōtum,  
 quot sunt quotque fuēre, Mārce Tullī,  
 quotque post aliīs erunt in annīs,  
 grātiās tibi maximās Catullus  
 5 agit, pessimus omnium poēta,  
 tantō pessimus omnium poēta  
 quantō tū optimus omnium patrōnus.

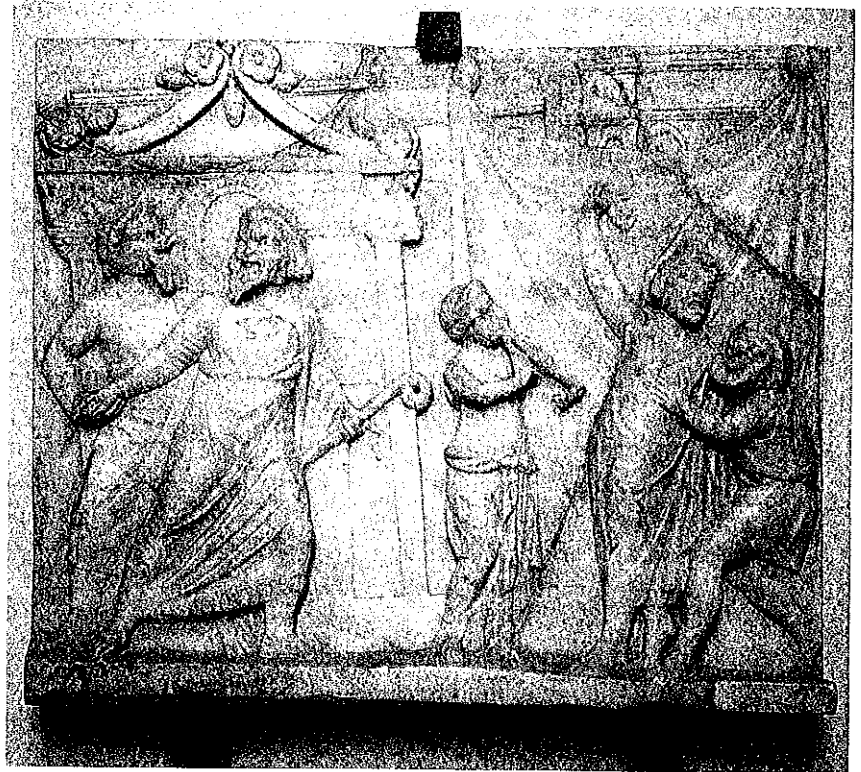
\*Catullus *Carm.* 49: The poet sends "thanks" to the orator and statesman, Marcus Tullius Cicero; whether or not the tone is ironic is a matter much debated by scholars, but it is worth noting here that Cicero had not only on occasion expressed his disdain for romantic poetry, but also had defended the Caelius Rufus of Catullus 58 on charges the orator claimed were instigated by Clodia/Lesbia. Like Catullus 58 above, this poem is structured as a single, long sent., and its meter is hendecasyllabic.—*dīsertus*, -a, -um, *eloquent, learned*; "dissertation."—*fuēre*: = *fuērunt*, see Capvt XII.—*post*: = *postea*.—*tantō . . . quantō*, *just as much . . . as*.—*tū*: sc. *es*.

**QVAESTIŌNĒS**: Irony can often be detected by the intonation of a speaker, or a poet reciting his verse, but is sometimes difficult to discern in a written text; what do you see as this poem's most striking stylistic feature (occurring in virtually every line) and how might its exuberance suggest that Catullus' "thank you" here is in fact sarcastic? **INTER-TEXTUALITY**, i.e., resonances between one literary text and another, can often be a clue to an author's intent; what connection do you see between this poem's opening line, and the closing verse of poem 58, and, if deliberate, what might its purpose be?

## An Uncle's Love for His Nephew and Adopted Son

Adulēscēns est cārīor mihi quam ego ipse! Atque hic nōn est filius meus sed ex frātre meō. Studia frātris iam diū sunt dissimillima meīs. Ego vītā urbānam ēgī et ōtium petīvī et, id quod quīdam fortunātius putant, uxōrem numquam habuī. Ille, autem, haec omnia fēcīt: nōn in forō sed in agrīs vītā ēgīt, parvum pecūniae accēpit, uxōrem pudīcam dūxit, duōs filiōs habuit. Ex illō ego hunc maiōrem adoptāvī mihi, ēdūxī ā parvō puerō, amāvī prō meō. In eō adulēscēnte est dēlectātiō mea; solum id est cārū mihi.

Terence *Ad.* 39–49: Terence (Publius Terentius Afer, ca. 185–159 B.C.), brought to Rome from Carthage as a slave, was subsequently freed and went on to a career as comic playwright and producer. The *Adelphoe*, *Brothers*, last of his six plays, is a comedy of manners, something like a modern "sitcom," about two fathers with quite different philosophies about raising their adolescent sons; Micio, the more lenient father, speaks here about his affection for his son, whom he has adopted from his brother.—*iam diū*: commonly used with a pres. tense verb for an action begun in the past but continuing in



Scene from Terence's comedy, *The Andria*. Marble bas-relief, 1st cent. A.D.  
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy

the pres., where in Eng., and thus in translation, we would use perf. tense.—*dūxit*: here, *married*.—*adoptāre*, = Eng.; “adoption,” “adoptive.”—*ēdūxī*: *raised*.—*id*: *this thing*, i.e., their relationship.

**QVAESTIŌNĒS**: It was a matter of great importance in the Greco-Roman world for a man to have a male heir; why did Micio resort to adoption? Marriage humor was standard fodder for comics in antiquity as it is today; what is the joke here?

## SCRĪPTA IN PARIETIBVS

Liquāmen optimum!

Liquamen  
optimum

*CIL* 4.9415: Not exactly a graffito, but another example of Roman script: just as manufacturers label jars and cans of processed foods today, ancient food producers incised or